

I claim:

1. In a distributed communication system in which a plurality of users associated with different realms access the Internet via a corresponding PC through a service provider, a device for providing instant messaging between the users, said device comprising:

an IM manager associated with the PC of a first user and arranged to obtain a foreign protocol for communicating with another realm; and

an IM server including an IM database with a listing of users currently connected to the Internet, each having a unique identifier;

said IM manager being further arranged to receive the unique identifier of a particular user associated with said another realm from said IM server and to establish connection to said other user using said foreign protocol.

2. The device of claim 1 further comprising a local database arranged to store a plurality of foreign protocols, each protocol being associated with a corresponding different realm.

3. The device of claim 1 wherein said IM server is arranged and constructed to connect to the Internet and to receive and transmit information to and from said IM manager via the Internet.

4. The device of claim 1 wherein said IM database is arranged to store information related to all said users.

5. The device of claim 1 further comprising a display arranged to show a list of current friends of a user and a selector operated by said user to select a friend from said list to establish communication.

6. A system for establishing instant messaging between a first user associated with a first realm and a second user associated with a second realm over the Internet, said system comprising:

a first and a second PC for operation by said first and second users respectively, each PC including a screen to display information, a selector or other input device for giving and receiving commands and selections, a communication port arranged to communicate with other users over the Internet, and an IM component arranged to establish IM sessions during which said first and second users can exchange one of instant messages and other information over the Internet, said IM component including means for receiving a request for an IM session and means for generating a request for said IM session; said IM component including an IM database storing a protocol for the other realm; and

an IM database arranged to store a list of users registered to access instant messaging and being currently active together with their current IP address;

wherein said IM component is arranged to receive a command from said first user to establish said IM session with said second user and in response to said request said IM component is arranged to obtain the current IP address of said second user and to send an access request to said second user based on said IP address and said protocol and to establish said IM session if said access is accepted.

7. The system of claim 6 wherein said users are arranged to communicate over the Internet by different SPs wherein said IM database is incorporated into one of said SPs.

8. The system of claim 6 further comprising an IM service provider wherein said IM database is incorporated into said IM service provider.

9. The system of claim 6 wherein said IM database is arranged to store a list of all users registered to access instant messaging.

10. The system of claim 6 wherein each said is arranged to display a window on said screen, said window identifying a list of friends of the corresponding user, said friends being currently on line.

11. The system of claim 10 wherein said PC is adapted to display a message area in one of said window and a separate window.

12. The system of claim 11 wherein said PC is adapted to receive commands from the respective user to establish a first IM session between said first user and said second user and a second IM session between said first user and a third user, said third user being identified in said window.

13. The system of claim 13 wherein said PC is adapted to allow said first user to switch between said first IM session and said second session, said first and second IM sessions being active simultaneously.

14. The system of claim 13 wherein said PC is adapted to display in said message area messages with said second user during said first IM session and messages with said third user during said second IM session.

15. The system of claim 10 wherein said PC is adapted to show characteristics of said friends.

16. A method of conducting an instant messaging session between a first user and a second user over the Internet, the users being associated with two different realms, each realm being accessible via the Internet using a protocol characteristic to the realm, each user getting access to the Internet via a corresponding PC, at least one PC having a storage media for storing the characteristic protocol of the other realm, the method comprising the steps of:

determining a current IP address of the second user; and

establishing a connection from said first and second users using said current IP address and said characteristic protocol.

17. The method of claim 16 wherein each time one of said first and second users access the Internet, the corresponding PC sends a message to an IM database indicating that the corresponding user is on line and said current IP address.

18. The method of claim 17 wherein said step of determining said current IP address comprises retrieving said address from said IM database.

19. The method of claim 17 further comprising sending a connection request from the first to the second PC for establishing said instant message session.

20. The method of claim 19 further comprising generating a response to said connection request by said second PC accepting said connection request.

21. The method of claim 16 wherein said step establishing said connection comprises establishing a peer-to-peer connection.

22. The method of claim 16 further comprising displaying a window on the screen of said PCs, said window indicating a list of active users.

23. The method of claim 22 further comprising displaying said window with a message area, said message area being used to indicate messages between said users.